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# Top spy Casey at eye of CIA's storm with Congress

By Terry Atlas

WASHINGTON—Six months ago, William J. Casey was awarded the CIA's highest medal for, the citation said, restoring the agency's credibility and "bringing imagination to our operation."

Now there may be some at the Central Intelligence Agency who wonder whether it should recall its medal from the nation's top spymaster whose very secretiveness, ironically, has drawn the agency into its potentially most damaging confrontation with Congress in a decade.

The uproar over what congressmen claim they weren't told about the CIA's role in mining Nicaraguan ports has provoked the kinds of troubling questions about covert operations last heard in the mid-1970s amid disclosures that the agency spied on Americans and plotted to kill foreign leaders. And it raises doubts about the effectiveness of the congressional oversight process, which may lead to new restrictions on how the CIA is permitted to go about its cloak-and-dagger business in Central America and elsewhere.

"The recent furor is hurting the CIA, and I think that's really too bad," observes Lt. Gen. [ret.] Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser during the Ford administration and an informal adviser to President Reagan.

**BESIDES COSTING** the administration congressional acquiescence for its not-so-secret war against Nicaragua's Sandinista government, the controversy is endangering support for its broader policies for Central America, including action on emergency military aid to El Salvador.

At the center of all this is Casey—wealthy businessman, Reagan confidant and manager of his 1980 presidential campaign, cold warrior and spymaster. His roots go back to the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's predecessor, where he directed American spies dropped behind Nazi lines in World War II.

Seen emerging from a black limousine wearing a dark raincoat and hat, he looks like he could have been dispatched to the CIA's headquarters in nearby Langley, Va., by central casting for the part of the nation's top "spook."

Gruff and abrasive, his tendency to mumble when he speaks reinforces the impression that he is being less than forthcoming, which indeed is often the case. Friends and critics alike joke that he is the first CIA director who doesn't need a telephone voice scrambler to protect his conversations.

**"HIS PERSONALITY** tends to turn a lot of people off," says one Capitol Hill staff member privy to Casey briefings.

Since taking over as CIA chief three years ago, Casey has achieved his aims of getting more money for the agency, rebuilding its covert operations side and making it an active tool in Reagan's aggressively anti-Soviet foreign policy. He clearly continues to have the confidence of the President and his closest White House advisers. But his determined style has seriously hurt CIA relations with many in Congress, who blame him for keeping them largely in the dark about the mining and the CIA's role in the previous attack on Nicaragua's oil supplies.

Caricature by Kerry Waghorn

William Casey

For his part, Casey makes little effort to conceal his scorn for Congress, which he feels has unfairly questioned his qualifications, his judgment and his integrity since his appointment in 1981.

Members of Congress faulted his selection as inappropriate because he had run the President's campaign. Later his judgment was challenged when the man he put in charge of the agency's clandestine operations was accused by a business associate of violating securities laws and resigned [although he was never charged with violating any laws]. And he was attacked for his personal financial dealings while head of the CIA.

**MOST RECENTLY** he has been interviewed by the FBI as part of its investigation of how the 1980 Reagan campaign obtained documents from the Carter White House.

In appearances before members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, Casey has proven a most reluctant, sometimes hostile, often arrogant witness who offers information only sparingly and grudgingly.

"He tells us the bare minimum," complains a staff member on the House Select Committee on Intelligence.

His problems reflect style as much as substance, appointing, for instance, a 30-year veteran of the CIA's clandestine operations, Clair George, to oversee congressional relations. "He is a full-fledged spy where, in my judgment, openness and communication are the skills that you want," says a staff member on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "Instead, they've got somebody with a 30-year career for secrecy."

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